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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 07/31/09

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Prime Minister's schedule, July 30

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
July 31, 2009

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07:35 Took a walk around the official residence.
10:38 Met at Kantei UNESCO Director-General Matsuura and Japanese Ambassador to UNESCO Yamamoto, followed by Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Hayashi.
11:08 Attended a young people employment project team meeting. Afterward met Hayashi.
11:47 Met LDP reform proportion headquarters chief Chuma.
13:05 Visited RKC Instrument Inc. in Kugahara accompanied by former Lower House member Hirotaka Ishihara.
14:38 Visited the Musashi-koyama shopping district in Koayma, accompanied by former Lower House members Ishihara and Junichiro Yasui.
15:59 Met at LDP headquarters Secretary General Hosoda, Policy Research Council Senior Deputy Chairman Sonoda, manifesto project team leader Suga, and others.
18:31 Attended an LDP legal team regular meeting.
18:50 Returned to Kantei.
19:30 Returned to his official residential quarters.

4) Tohoku University received Iranian student from institute suspected of nuclear development who studied nuclear fuel reprocessing in 2002-06

YOMIURI (Top play) (Full)
July 31, 2009

It was learned on July 30 that the nuclear engineering laboratory of Tohoku University had trained a student from an Iranian research institute on the list of the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) of entities possibly involved with the development of nuclear arms in the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. Amid growing concerns in the international community regarding nuclear proliferation, the flaws in Japanese laws regarding the prevention of the transfer of advanced technology and the laxity of the university's checks are likely to become an issue.

METI initiated a "foreign users' list" under the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law in 2002, and there are some 250 organizations on the list, including those in Iran and North Korea, which are suspected of developing nuclear weapons. When accepting students from research institutes on the list, Japanese institutions are required to "ascertain" if there are any links to the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

The Iranian student came to Japan in September 2002 and enrolled in the Quantum Science and Energy Department of Tohoku University's Graduate School in October. In March 2004, the Jaber Ibn Hayan Research Laboratories, to which the student belonged prior to coming to Japan, was added to METI's list.

This student studied the technology to recover useful metals, such as silver, from nuclear waste solution generated when spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed. While this was not directly connected to the extraction of plutonium, such knowledge could play an important role in developing a reprocessing system aimed at manufacturing nuclear bombs.

However, the Foreign Exchange Law is aimed at ensuring free trade and transfer of technology and has a provision on equal treatment of foreign nationals and Japanese beyond six months after coming to Japan. Therefore, this student was not legally subject to "ascertainment" when his mother institution was put on the METI

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list. He continued his research and returned to Iran after obtaining his doctoral degree in September 2006.

METI says that: "Since the purpose of the law is to prevent the transfer of technology, the university should have re-examined the propriety of giving this student training after the list was released in 2004. We would like to talk to the Tohoku University about this."

The United States has imposed restrictions on issuing visas to students from countries suspected of developing WMDs since 1998. Waseda University Professor Takehiko Yamamoto, who specializes in national security, says: "In the U.S. it is unthinkable that students from research institutes included in a watch list could enter the country. Japan also needs a legal system to restrict entry of such students."

On the other hand, Professor Akira Hasegawa of Tohoku University's Quantum Energy Department explains: "We found no problem since the subject the student researched did not require the use of nuclear materials."

5) Iranian who studied nuclear technology: Tohoku University says: "No strict order from government," showing lack of sense of vigilance

YOMIURI (Page 36) (Slightly abridged)
July 31, 2009

In connection with Tohoku University Graduate School's Quantum Science and Engineering Department giving research training to a student from an Iranian institution said to be involved with the development of nuclear arms, a university official pointed to the government's responsibility: "There was no strict order from the government, so there was no need to deal actively with the matter." Iran is suspected of enriching uranium and developing nuclear weapons. There are also concerns about the proliferation of nuclear technology to North Korea. Yet, universities and research institutes lack a sense of vigilance.

According to documents submitted to Tohoku University, the student completed graduate study in petroleum chemistry at the Sharif University of Technology in 1994. After working at three companies, including a chemical plant firm, the Iranian worked at the Jaber Ibn Hayan Research Laboratories from 1998. He entered Tohoku University in October 2002, a year after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Shortly before the student's entry, Iranian anti-establishment activists revealed that Iran had secretly been building large scale nuclear facilities. However, no one raised any issue at the meeting of academic advisers in the Quantum Science and Engineering Department, which makes decisions on the admission of graduate students, according to sources.

Although the Jaber Ibn Hayan Research Laboratories went on the list of the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) of organizations suspected of involvement in nuclear arms development in 2004, the Iranian student continued to do research relating to the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. The professor specializing in nuclear chemical engineering who instructed this student in his research was at a loss. He said: "I believe that the technology of treating nuclear waste solution which I taught him is not linked to the development of nuclear arms. I only learned about the watch list

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recently."

Current head of the department Professor Akira Hasegawa said: "It would have been a different story if there had been direct orders from the Ministry of Education. There was none at that time. When METI published the list, we took very little notice of it."

Yomiuri Shimbun asked to interview the professor of thermal engineering who mediated for the Iranian student to study in Japan (retired in 2003, currently professor emeritus) several times and has also sent him written questions, but the daily has not received a response as of July 30.

6) LDP to use toned-down expression in policy platform on reinterpretation of Constitution on collective self-defense

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso discussed the final draft of the Liberal Democratic Party's policy platform, which is to be officially announced today, with Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosoda, Election Strategy Council Vice Chairman Yoshihide Suga, and other party executives yesterday. They decided to tone down the wording in the final draft expressing the party's willingness to undertake a review of the government's interpretation of the Constitution to enable the Self-Defense Force's exercise of the right to collective self-defense. This decision reflects growing calls for caution about the review within the party.

The final draft noted: "The government will reconstruct the laws related to security policy that should be amended, including a review of the government's interpretation of the right to collective self-defense in order to protect Japan from North Korea's missile and nuclear threats." With respect to collective self-defense, the draft specified: "The government will make adjustments so that the use of the right will be compatible with the Constitution." The review of the provision for collective self-defense is Aso's stock argument, but a number of lawmakers mainly in the New Komeito have raised objections. Under this situation, there was concern about the schism in the ruling camp deepening ahead of the Aug. 30 general election.

7) DPJ wavering over extension of refueling operation

ASAHI (Page 3) (Abridged)
July 31, 2009

Nao Fujita

The major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) is agonizing over the question of whether or not to allow the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) to continue its refueling operation in the Indian Ocean in the event the party takes over the reins of government. The party has thus far opposed the operation as an opposition party. But should the party, once it takes the helm of government, give priority to relations with the United States? The party has yet to finalize its position, and party executives' opinions have been wavering.

Japan has been continuing its refueling mission as a symbol of its cooperation with the U.S. in the war on terror that started after

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the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. DPJ President Yukio Hatoyama denied yesterday the option of immediately ending the mission, citing the importance of diplomatic continuity. At the same time, Hatoyama said that his party will not basically extend the operation beyond the expiration next January of the law authorizing the operation.

But "discontinuation of the operation" did not make the draft of the DPJ's policy index or its manifesto (campaign pledges) for the upcoming House of Representatives election. DPJ Secretary General Katsuya Okada, meeting the press yesterday, simply said, "We have yet to make a decision."

The party is not monolithic because there are gaps in views among

DPJ executives about the question of whether to give priority to the DPJ's relationship with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) or to relations with the United States for the sake of the stability of a DPJ administration. The DPJ knows that it will not be able to earnestly address such issues as a drastic review of the realignment of U.S. forces until after it wins a working majority through the Upper House election next summer that will allow the party to keep a distance from the SDP.

Hatoyama, who has a good chance to become the next prime minister, attaches importance to the stability of the foundation of a DPJ administration. Hatoyama told SDP head Mizuho Fukushima on the phone yesterday that his party will not extend the refueling operation. Throughout his tenure as DPJ secretary general since 2007 when the opposition camp won control of the Upper House, Hatoyama persistently opposed the refueling operation. For this reason, Hatoyama is working very hard so that he will not be criticized by the ruling camp as having changed his stance.

Meanwhile, Okada gives consideration to his party's relationship with the United States. Okada met visiting Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell on July 17 in which he told Campbell a plan to build a relationship of trust between President Obama and "prime minister" Hatoyama first. Policy Research Committee Chair Masayuki Naoshima, too, moved in the direction of not specifying "non-extension" in the policy index.

The difference in views can be taken as role-sharing with the aim of avoiding confrontations in other areas.

But all sides agree on one point: the government has not fulfilled its accountability regarding the refueling mission. But that means the continuation of the mission could be an option for the DPJ once a DPJ administration fulfills its accountability on the matter. The confrontation may flare up again between conservative members, including Seiji Maehara, who moved to condone the refueling operation when he was serving as DPJ president, and the former socialist group that cites the ambiguity of a UN resolution and the unconstitutionality of the operation.

Ichiro Ozawa, who has maintained his influence in the party even after resigning as president, is closer to the view held by the former socialist group.

8) U.S. sailor gets life in prison for killing taxi driver

ASAHI (Page 35) (Full)
July 31, 2009

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In the stabbing death of 61-year-old taxi driver Masaaki Takahashi in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, in March last year, the Yokohama District Court yesterday sentenced Olatunbosun Ugbogu, a 23-year-old Yokosuka-based U.S. Navy seaman apprentice, to life imprisonment on murder-robbery charges as demanded by the prosecutors.

Ugbogu maintained that he "did it at the order of a voice" resulting from an auditory hallucination, and whether he was mentally competent to be held responsible for his action was mainly in focus. Presiding judge Masaaki Kawaguchi concluded that Ugbogu was competent to be held responsible for his action, stating that what he calls a "voice" does not exist when judging from such factors as a physician's expert opinion and his actions after committing the crime. The judge noted: "This case, as an incident brought about by a U.S. military deserter, gave a great shock not only to Yokosuka and other base-neighboring residents but also to the general public, and its social impact is tremendous."

After the court ruling, U.S. Naval Forces Japan headquarters released a comment: "We will continue to step up the education and training of seamen and families."

9) 12 U.S. soldiers desert, 6 missing; Local residents uninformed

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged)

July 31, 2009

U.S. Forces Japan began in July last year to inform local governments hosting U.S. military bases through the Japanese government about U.S. military deserters. Since then, a total of 12 U.S. servicemen have deserted from U.S. bases in the prefectures of Kanagawa, Nagasaki, and Okinawa, and six of the 12 deserters are still missing, the Tokyo Shimbun has found from Kanagawa and other prefectures. This is the first time that the facts about deserters have been unveiled.

In Kanagawa Prefecture, there were seven deserters from U.S. military bases. Two of them have yet to be located. In their breakdown, four of them were based at Yokosuka, and three were crewmen on board naval ships that called at Yokosuka.

In June last year, Kanagawa prefectural police placed U.S. military deserters on the wanted list at the U.S. military's request for detention. The prefectural police are ready to report their discovery of those deserters to the U.S. military. In February this year, a defector from the Yokosuka base was found in Tokyo when questioned by a police officer of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department.

The U.S. military, however, is to provide prefectural governments or base-hosting municipalities with information about its deserters through the Japanese government. It therefore takes at least two days or more than a week after the U.S. military's request to police for search and detention, according to local officials. Yokosuka City says it does not disclose individual information, so its citizens were not informed of the deserters.

Masahiko Goto, a lawyer familiar with base issues, noted: "Base-hosting local communities have great misgivings about public security. Information about deserters should be given to local residents as well."

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10) Aso: If North Korean nuclear issue becomes serious, calls for nuclear armament might grow stronger

ASAHI (Page 1) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso during the Japan-South Korean summit held in Tokyo on June 28 said that if the North Korean nuclear issue becomes serious, calls in Japan for the country to arm itself with nuclear weapons would grow stronger, according to several sources connected with Japan-ROK relations. The prime minister took up the issue as an example of the need to exhort greater efforts from China, which holds the key to the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, the sources revealed.

The remarks were made at a meeting attended only by Aso, President Lee Myung Bak, and a handful of officials, including the foreign ministers of the two countries. There had been an agreement to discuss North Korean issues only and not to make public what was discussed there.

In the event China does not earnestly implement the UN Security Council sanctions resolution, Aso and Lee agreed on the need to send a message to China that both Japan and South Korea would have to increase their defense capabilities to counter North Korea. Prime Minister Aso referred to the possibility of growing calls for the possession of nuclear weapons in that context, according to a source.

A government source said, "The tone was not such that Japan will go nuclear," adding that it did not invite strong objections from the ROK side.

Nevertheless, China is reportedly alarmed about the emergence of calls for nuclear armament in Japan and South Korea in the wake of North Korea's nuclear test. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, too, has mentioned the option of strengthening its nuclear umbrella

for Japan and South Korea. (The United States) has taken steps to prevent Japan and South Korea from discussing nuclear options. Aso's remarks made as if to take advantage of the nuclear armament discussion in the country is likely to be criticized as inappropriate as prime minister.

11) Governmental preliminary talks to start on East Asian FTA

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Yoichi Iwamoto, Hanoi

Major Asian countries, including the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, Japan and China, will soon start talks on a plan to create a free trade agreement (FTA) covering the entire East Asian region. They plan to raise to the official level the current unofficial committee of experts. The upgraded panel will discuss how negotiations should be pursued in the future.

ASEAN has already concluded FTAs with some countries, but the plan is aimed to sweepingly liberalize trade in the region. A reduction in tariffs in the region will make industries in East Asia more competitive. It will also contribute to expanding trade in the

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region and to enhancing its role as a locomotive for the global economy.

Launching preliminary consultation for an East Asian FTA will be discussed at an economic ministerial meeting of ASEAN and six economies to be held in Bangkok on Aug. 13-16 and on other occasions. The ministerial meeting will bring together ministers from 16 countries, including the 10 ASEAN countries and six countries, such as Japan, China, and India.

For the preliminary consultation, there are two ideas - one calling for inviting 13 countries (Japan, China and South Korea in addition to ASEAN) and another calling for bringing together 16 countries (Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand, in addition to ASEAN). Final coordination is now underway.

In the ministerial meeting in Bangkok, the participants are expected to basically agree to start the preliminary consultation. The countries will initiate governmental negotiations after the end of the preliminary consultation. In the negotiations, they will discuss the margin of reduction in tariffs, items that should not be covered by the FTA, and other details. If an FTA is concluded, it might develop into an economic partnership agreement (EPA), which also includes services, investment and intellectual property.

Japan has already concluded a comprehensive EPA with ASEAN, and some parts have come into effect. But it will not be easy to reach an agreement on tariff cuts with countries exporting agricultural products, such as Australia and China.

12) DPJ Hatoyama on proposal for FTA with U.S.: Rice will be treated as exception

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Yukio Hatoyama yesterday delivered a campaign speech in Suwa City, Nagano Prefecture. Referring to the party's proposal in its policy platform for the upcoming House of Representatives election to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S., he indicated that rice would be treated as an exception, remarking: "We will not simply open the door (to imports) of products that are the mainstay of our agricultural sector, such as rice. We will emphasize that point in negotiations, so you do not need to worry."

The ruling camp has criticized the DPJ's idea of an FTA with the U.S., saying that domestic farmers will receive a serious blow. Hatoyama refuted: "Domestic agriculture fell into ruins due to the government of the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito. We

will take satisfactory measures to make Japanese farmers strong enough to counter pressure from foreign countries."

13) Poll: 20 PERCENT of "undecided" voters opt for DPJ

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Abridged)
July 31, 2009

The Nihon Keizai Shimbun conducted an online poll on July 28-30 toward the upcoming election for the House of Representatives. Among those who answered in the last online poll that they did not know which political party they would vote for in their proportional

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representation blocs, 20 PERCENT this time opted for the Democratic Party of Japan, with 6 PERCENT choosing the Liberal Democratic Party. Among those who chose the LDP in the last poll, 8 PERCENT changed to the DPJ, with only 3 PERCENT switching from the DPJ to the LDP.

Respondents were also asked which political party's candidate they would vote for in their single-seat constituencies. Among those who answered in the last poll that they "don't know," 19 PERCENT now chose the DPJ's candidate, with 9 PERCENT preferring the LDP's. In the last poll, 9 PERCENT of those who chose the LDP's candidate changed to the DPJ's, with 2 PERCENT switching from the DPJ's candidate to the LDP's.

The poll was conducted by Nikkei Research Inc. on the Internet, with a total of 3,500 persons chosen from among male and female voters aged 20 and over across the nation. The retrieval rate was 34.5 PERCENT in the first online poll and 34.1 PERCENT in the second one.

The proportion of those "very interested" in the general election rose 10 PERCENT. "Very interested" and "somewhat interested" totaled more than 90 PERCENT. A total of nearly 80 PERCENT answered "yes" when asked if they would like to see a change of government. The figure neared 40 PERCENT even among LDP supporters and was over 90 PERCENT among DPJ supporters.

Respondents were further asked if they would vote in the general election. To this question, "yes" rose 6 points from the last poll and already neared 80 PERCENT. Those who answered "yes" and those thinking of going to the polls totaled more than 90 PERCENT.

14) Prime minister takes to the streets

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Prime Minister Taro Aso on July 30 inspected small- and medium-size companies and neighborhoods. When he visited Musashi-Koyama Shopping Mall Palm, he exchanged words with shop-keepers, shook hands with shoppers and had taken commemorative photos with them.

The prime minister's plan was to call around industrial organizations after the Lower House dissolution and start stumping speeches on August 1. However, yesterday he took up a microphone, urged by people of the Shopping Mall and made an impassioned speech: "In order for local regions to become revitalized, shopping streets must be revitalized. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will continue policies to turn around the economy without causing disorder."

He visited RKC Instrument, an electric measuring equipment manufacturer in Ota Ward, before visiting the shopping mall.

15) Lack of consistency among DPJ leaders regarding party's manifesto

SANKEI (Page 2) (Full)
July 31, 2009

Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) President Yukio Hatoyama on July 27 issued the party's manifesto (campaign pledges) for the upcoming

House of Representatives election. But his comment later, "This is not an official manifesto," has created a stir.

The ruling parties are criticizing Hatoyama, who once said about the manifesto that it "bears political accountability." Even DPJ Deputy President Ichiro Ozawa has complained to Hatoyama. It has now been revealed that DPJ leaders are not fully communicating with one another.

Hatoyama told reporters on July 29 in Kikuyo Town, Kumamoto Prefecture, where he was stumping on the campaign trail: "The manifesto released (on the 27th) is not a formal one. We are allowed to distribute our official manifesto only after the start of official campaigning period for the Lower House election."

The purpose of his comment was to add to the manifesto Osaka Gov. Toru Hashimoto's call for mentioning the establishing of a consultative panel (on decentralization reform) of the central and local governments in the DPJ's manifesto. Hashimoto criticized the DPJ's manifesto for not including such. DPJ Secretary General Katsuya Okada, who took the initiative in drafting the manifesto, said on July 30: "If necessary, it will be possible to alter (the manifesto)."

Referring to the establishment of a consultative council, Ozawa, however, told reporters yesterday Kako City, Gifu Prefecture:

"It is not wrong to include such, but we have asserted that we will substantially change the present administrative system. It is unnecessary to discuss matters premised on the present systems."

Ozawa took a position that there was no need to add it to the manifesto.

Meanwhile, New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa made this comment: "(Hatoyama) said that he would resign as DPJ president if the manifesto is not implemented. That's really wishy-washy." A government source also remarked: "Since Mr. Hatoyama says so, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will be able to correct after it reveals its manifesto."

16) Three opposition parties agree to leave sales tax rate unchanged for next four years, skirt foreign and defense policy issues

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
July 31, 2009

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the People's New Party (PNP) are now readying a common set of policies for the Lower House election. The draft was revealed on July 30. It features that should the three opposition parties form a coalition government after the Lower House election, they will leave the sales tax rate unchanged for the next four years. It does not incorporate foreign affairs and security policies, over which they are at odds. The overseas dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces' troops was not included, either. The package will be released in mid-August before the official announcement of the Lower House election.

Provided that they secure a majority in the Lower House election, the three parties will proceed with talks on the launching of a coalition government, based on this common policy package. The

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package first notes the maintaining of the sales tax rate as a common policy, by categorically mentioning that there will be no hike in the sales tax during their administration.

The package also incorporates: (1) a drastic review of the postal business; (2) scrapping the medical service system for the elderly people aged 75 or older; (3) building a safety net to protect jobs; and (4) free high school education through the provision of

financial assistance equivalent to tuition fees to public high school students and to households with private high school students.

Regarding the postal services business, the draft package notes that the current four-company system (under Japan Post Holdings Co.) should be reviewed and the sale of stocks of three members of the Japan Post Group should be put on ice. The draft package also pledges that the government will assist an increased share in national health insurance as a result of the abolition of the medical service system for the elderly people aged 75 or older.

In order to build an employment safety network, the three parties will aim to drastically amend the Worker Dispatch Law, which bans, in principle, the dispatch of workers to manufacturing companies.

Referring to the common policy package of the three parties, Secretary General Katsuya Okada at a press conference on the 30th said: "We want to show our common perception as parties that will fight the election battle together. It would be all right if we come up with policy proposals in a major direction, instead of detailed and specific policies."

Secretaries general and policy-planning officers of the three parties will meet on the 31st and enter near final talks on the common policy package.

17) DPJ's Okada gives LDP's manifesto for 2005 Lower House election score of 20

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At a press conference yesterday in Shizuoka City, Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) Secretary General Katsuya Okada released his party's assessments of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) manifesto (campaign pledges) for the House of Representatives election in 2000. The purpose of the DPJ is to give voters the impression of the LDP failing to realize its campaign pledges despite a governing party, before the LDP reveals its manifesto on July 31. The ruling coalition has criticized the DPJ's manifesto as irresponsible for not mentioning fiscal resources for implementing its pledges.

The DPJ verified the stages of completion of 21 areas of the LDP's manifesto such as (1) postal privatization, (2) pension, (3) issue of lack of doctors, (4) childcare programs, and (5) measures for non-permanent workers.

On postal privatization, which was the major issue in the 2005 Lower House election, the DPJ analyzes that the widening social gap has been ignored, the social security system was destroyed, and the fiscal condition is deteriorating, leaving many issues unresolved.

With regard to child-raising assistance, on which both the DPJ and

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LDP give priority in the election campaign, the DPJ reviews that for the LDP, free child education is a special feature of general elections, pointing out that the LDP had included this issue in the previous election.

Although the LDP compiled its own assessment on its campaign pledged for the 2005 Lower House election that there were no pledges not yet dealt with, Okada severely criticized, saying: "The degree of attainment of the manifesto is 20 to 30 percent. The LDP has not fulfilled what it had pledged four years ago."

Okawa was president of the DPJ in 2005 when the previous Lower House election was held, but he quit his post to take responsibility for the DPJ's failure in the election. All the more because of that, he expressed his anger, saying: "Four years ago, the LDP emphasized that reforms must not be stopped. What did that mean?"

18) New Komeito expects "return" in proportional representation system; Supporting 92 LDP candidates

The New Komeito on July 30 decided to recommend 92 Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) candidates running in single-seat constituencies for the upcoming Lower House election. It plans to add to this number of backed candidates before the official announcement of the election on August 18.

The New Komeito's strategy is to support candidates running on the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) ticket in single-seat constituencies, where it does not field its own candidates and to receive in return for that cooperation the votes of LDP supporters for the proportional representation section of the election. This is a so-called "barter cooperation." A certain LDP member pointed out, "How the LDP cooperates with the New Komeito in the proportional representation section of the elections becomes in fact the judgment standard when endorsing our own candidates."

Replying to a question that the LDP's cooperation with the New Komeito is seen in its standard for endorsing its own candidates, New Komeito Secretary General Kitagawa during a press conference on the 30th said: "To begin with, some candidates do not ask for the party's recommendation. The issue of whether to give recommendations to candidates or not has also to do with candidates the party gave recommendations to in the past. The situation differs according to individual cases."

As a matter of fact, bargaining is going on between the LDP and the New Komeito over endorsements of election candidates. The LDP Chiba Chapter this time applied for recommendations for candidates for all of its 13 single-seat constituencies. However, the New Komeito Chiba headquarters asked them, "We want the LDP to give 5,000 votes to the New Komeito from each constituency." As a result, only three received party recommendations.

The LDP has yet to endorse Prime Minister Aso. The New Komeito Fukuoka headquarters said, "We have not yet received a request for an endorsement from the prime minister."

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